

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An automated prescription dispensing system comprising:

5           a patient interface having a data interface configured for entering information correlated to the patient and a receptacle through which medication is dispensed;

          a dispenser disposed in communication with the patient interface portion for holding and dispensing medication; and

10           a controller in communication with the dispensing portion for selectively controlling the dispensing of medication disposed in the dispensing portion.

2. The automated prescription dispensing system of  
15           claim 1, wherein the data interface comprises a keyboard.

3. The automated prescription dispensing system of  
          claim 1, wherein the data interface comprises a magnetic card reader.

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4. The automated prescription dispensing system of  
          claim 1, wherein the patient interface further comprises a display screen.

5. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 1, wherein the patient interface further comprises a speaker.

5           6. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 1, wherein the patient interface further comprises a printer.

7. The automated prescription dispensing system of  
10 claim 1, wherein the dispenser comprises a plurality of medication receiving slots.

8. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 7, wherein the dispenser comprises at least one door  
15 disposed adjacent each receiving slot for selectively controlling the passage of medication through the dispenser.

9. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 8, wherein the at least one door comprises an access  
20 door for selectively preventing placement of medication into the receiving slot.

10. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 8, wherein the at least one door comprises a dispensing door for selectively releasing medication from the receiving slot.

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11. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 7, further comprising a plurality of sensors for determining the presence of medication within the plurality of receiving slots.

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12. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 7, wherein the controller is configured to track the location of medication disposed in one of the plurality of receiving slots.

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13. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 1, wherein the control comprises a data interface for entering information about each prescription loaded into the dispenser.

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14. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 13, wherein the data interface comprises a keyboard.

15. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 13, wherein the data interface comprises a scanner.

5 16. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 1, wherein the controller comprises a processor programmed to record information regarding the location of medications within the dispenser.

10 17. The automated prescription dispensing system of claim 1, wherein the controller further comprises a communications interface for communicating with remote locations.

15 18. A method for automated prescription dispensing comprising:

filling a prescription by obtaining a container with medication therein;

loading the prescription into a dispenser; and

20 dispensing the prescription to a patient in response to input of data correlated to the patient.

19. The method according to claim 18, wherein method comprises placing the prescription into a receiving slot of a dispenser having a plurality of receiving slots disposed therein.

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20. The method according to claim 19, wherein the method comprises correlating a receiving slot in which the prescription is placed with information regarding the patient.

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21. The method according to claim 20, further comprising releasing the prescription from the dispenser in response to input of data correlated to the patient.

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22. The method accord to claim 18, wherein the method comprises dispensing the prescription after the patient has entered a personal identification number.

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23. A method for dispensing medication from a dispenser having a plurality of receiving slots, the method comprising:

opening an available receiving slot;

inputting information regarding a prescription;

disposing the prescription in the receiving slot;  
closing the receiving slot; and  
dispensing the prescription from the receiving slot to  
a patient.

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24. A method for verifying a refill prescription, the  
method comprising:

obtaining information regarding a prescription to be  
refilled;

10 determining whether a new refill exceeds an authorized  
number of refills; and

sending an electronic inquiry to a doctor requesting an  
authorization to fill a refill prescription which exceeds  
the authorized number of refills.

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25. The method according to claim 24, wherein the  
method further comprises receiving an electronic  
authorization confirmation from a doctor.

20 26. The method according to claim 25, further  
comprising filling the prescription in response to the  
electronic authorization confirmation.

27. The method according to claim 24, wherein the method further comprises receiving an electronic denial of confirmation and generating instructions for a patient to contact the doctor.

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28. A method for billing prescriptions, the method comprising:

filling a prescription;

loading the prescription into an automated dispensing  
10 system;

dispensing the prescription to a patient in response to information correlated to the patient; and

generating a bill responsive to dispensing of the prescription.

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29. A method for more efficiently filling prescriptions, the method comprising:

collecting information for a plurality of prescriptions at a central processing location;

20 filling the prescriptions; and

transporting the prescriptions to a plurality of local pharmacies.

30. The method according to claim 29, wherein the method comprises receiving prescription information at local pharmacies and relaying the information to the central processing location.

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31. The method according to claim 29, wherein the method comprises organizing the prescriptions into groups based on the medication prescribed and filling the prescriptions by group.

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32. The method according to claim 29, further comprising loading the prescriptions into an automated dispensing system at the local pharmacy.

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